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Vanguard Princess: General System Mechanics and Mindset

October 25, 2010 7

Shinobi here. Long time member of Mizuumi and player/contributor to the Melty Blood community here to talk about a game that has been overlooked by most of the FG population.

In June 2009, a doujin fighting game was released by a ex-Capcom worker named Sugeno that used the Fighter Maker 2nd base engine. It was released around the same time a fighting game of extreme popularity in Japanese arcades was coming to the next-gen consoles there and overseas. That game was Blazblue: Calamity Trigger.

Awesome timing.

Although praised for its graphics and art style which pushed the limit of Fighter Maker capabilities, many people questioned how the general system and aesthetics were similar, yet different from most fighting games today. Vanguard Princess is a very in-depth game withan engine that makes it more like the old school fighting games of the 90s. It doesn't take (too) much from the usual "donjon engine" system (like airdashing, for one) and instead makes the game more about proper spacing and hit confirms. Attacks come at a very high price if not thought out correctly, but in Vanguard Princess it could mean 60-70% of your life, a very serious position disadvantage, or — in a specific VP case — assist downtime. VP doesn't usually consist of "who has better combos" type of matches and some moves are unbeatable if not avoided or defeated correctly. In this article, I will show you what you should know about the game, what to do when "X, Y, Z" happens, and usual breakdowns of the general fighting game spectrum and what VP has to offer. So let's get started!

Understand your normal FG notation and HUD before proceeding. I will not be going over any of this.

a. Combos/Attacking
b. Blocking/Shielding
c. Offensive Assist Use
d. The Importance of Proxy Shielding
e. Protecting Your Assists (Assist Meter Management)

First Lesson – Combos and Attacking

> *"Attacking is one of the two basic instincts of a fighting game. You gotta learn how to throw a punch!"*

As you should know by now, there are 3 attack buttons in pure donjon game style: Weak (A), Medium (B), and Strong (C).

Attacking in VP is just the same in any other fighting game on the market today. If an attack lands, your opponent can either get hit by it or defend against it. Meter wise, you will gain something for it. There are poking tools, footsies, projectiles, throws, anti-airs, and specials just to name a few. You can use these in succession to make your opponent keep blocking or to keep them guessing with a low or overhead. Mix it up some.

There are very few strings and targets in this game. String wise, you cannot cancel the recovery of one move to use another normal. Be wary of what you do when you try to build an offense by using random moves. This can also go for most specials.

Yui attacking with 5C

Assists can attack the enemy as well. This will be brought in-depth later on so keep reading!

The combo system in this game is damn near non-existent. This game thrives off of counter hits for combos, as this will be one of your main objectives in an offense. From counter hits (which have very long stun time), you will have enough time to use a special or tag your assist to attack for you. Counter hitting an attack strong enough on the ground will force your opponent to trip and fall so that you can followup. Counter hitting in the air has 2 different properties depending on what you used. For normal moves, your opponent will fly to the other side of the screen. For other certain moves, they will hit the wall fast enough to go into a juggle state and start spinning.

Juggles are relatively common in VP. While everyone has the ability to juggle for combos (Eri and Yui being particularly high damage), most of which these types of combos are done with assists.

Second Lesson – Blocking and Shielding

> *"The second of two basic instincts in a fighting game. A good defense is a good 'delaying the inevitable' technique!"*

Attacking has its benefits in any game, so does blocking. Blocking in VP is just like any other game, so I won't be talking about it.

Akane using a shield

Shields, however, are a different story.

If you ever played Melty Blood for one minute in your life, you would know that there is such a thing called a shield that can protect you from an attack without having to block. As with any game that has a shield-like button, there are pros and there are cons to using it. In general, there are 2 different types of shields in Vanguard Princess: Normal and Proxy (which I will go over in a future lesson). Normal shielding has 3 states in which you can do them from: standing, crouching, and aerial. Simple enough right?

The use of normal shields is rare in high level play as the risk is much higher than the reward. If you whiff a shield, you are in a counter hit state, which in turn is a very huge opening for your opponent. Like I said in the previous lesson, counter hits are very crucial in starting a combo or an offense. However, the reward puts you in the same situation if you land the shield. The reason why the reward is worse than the risk is that the frames to be in CH state from doing a shield is more than the shield itself. Also, the recovery of a whiffed shield is very long in VP compared to any other game that uses shields. Shields are always used best when you sense your opponent's next attack coming at you.

Third Lesson – Offensive Assist Use

> *"One cannot win a battle alone. Teamwork is essential to take down a strong opponent!"*

Assists are just what their name is: sub-characters that support your character in many ways. There are 4 assists in the game: Eko, Shiera, Kanae, and Juliet. All 4 of these assists have the same support system and uses, but their attacks are very different. Each one has a short range attack, long range or area of effect, and a reversal/blockstring breaker. Meter usage varies between each other as well. They have very special attacks that seperate one amongst the other 3.

Shiera using her long range assist attack (6D)

- Eko is best known as a jack of all trades assist. Her meter usage is the least. Her best attack is her reversal, which is a shoryuken.
- Shiera is a long range and area attacker. Her meter usage is medium. She has a good reversal, but is the best zoner out of the 4.
- Kanae is an assist that uses stationaries and objects to rail mixups. Her meter usage is medium. Her 6D is a ghost who will latch onto the opponent and deplete super meter if hit by it.
- Juliet is a pressure assist and the strongest of the 4. Her meter usage is amazingly high and she is the slowest. Most of her assists are very blockstring/pressure oriented so you can use her in that way.

All 4 have comboing abilities with their master and in some cases, can dramatically change the combo layout for your main character.

Now, assists are very very important in your overall game and will allow you to do and go places that you cannot reach. For one, Shiera can shoot down the opponent from far away and Eko can sneak behind the opponent and kick her from behind. If an unsafe special move can be assist canceled, you can call in an assist to make it safe for you to continue your offense. They can be used to add gimmicks and mixups to your oki game or just to keep the opponent blocking. As said before, an assists uses differ from which one you use so use one that best fits what you want to accomplish in the match forthcoming.

These assists are critical in your game as you cannot achieve most of what this game has to offer alone with just your main character. However, these assists are not fail-safe or guaranteed.

If your main character is struck while you have an active assist on the field, your assist will freeze whatever she is doing and reset herself back to your side. If that wasn't harmful enough, all of your assist meter will deplete to 0 and you will be restricted from doing any assisted action for a set amount of time. The severity of this time is by which assist move you used prior to the attack. The more meter used to activate your assist's failed attack, the more time you are unable to use your assist. This is also a very crucial subject to keep in mind when you are moving to attack or advance with your assist.

Overall, assists are very important in the meta-game and can surely stop any lame tactics by your opponent. They are versatile and usable in high level matches and flow. They make the game go incredibly fast when one hits the field as assists are fast to do what they have to do and leave in the same manner. Keep an eye on your assist meter and be aware of your main character if an assist is on the loose.

Lesson Four – The Importance of Proxy Shielding

> *"Take heed to all areas of your surroundings for you can lose all if you lack in one."*

We talked about normal shielding as one of the 2 ways you can block attacks in this game. The second type of shield is a very important one: the Proxy.

Proxy Shielding are shields that can only be done by your assists. They can only shield what your main character can't: projectiles and other assists. Understand that proxies are the only other option of defense for assists besides blocking. Of course this has major benefits since assists are vital in the game. The shield itself is very active and only shields what's ahead of the assist itself, not the main character. The only way you can be completely safe from an assist attack by proxy is to stand behind or be in the same place as the assist. If a proxy succeeds, both assists will remain active until the attacking assist resets back. The main character(s) is free to do whatever as the assists are fighting/blocking.

You can always put this to your advantage since an active assist will damage the assist meter.

Also, multi-hit assist attacks can be shielded once. A prime example of this is Eko's 3D. If you can shield the first hit, all the other hits will be shielded as well. Another example is Shiera's 6D as you can run into your opponent freely while the bullets are being proxied by your assist. Proxies can stop long range pressure as well since you can attack freely while your opponent's projectiles are being shielded.

Proxies are very important to stop any unnecessary advances on your defenses. The ability for your main character to attack while your assist is shielding makes the opponent think twice about throwing out his own assists.

Lesson Five – Protecting Your Assists (Assist Meter Management)

> *"Feed your men so they can fight harder for your name and never rebel against it."*

Juliet uses her 2D to protect Yui and deplete assist meter

We've covered most of the assist advantages and disadvantages. Now let's talk meter management for assists.

Earlier in this article, I gave the general uses of all 4 assists and gave you an estimate of their meter drainage. Now I'm going to go a little deeper and tell you about the meter itself. The assist meter has 6 levels (0 being none, 5 being max). Each attack that an assist uses has a certain level of attack that will coincide with how much meter you will use. If you do not have enough levels for a certain attack, your assist will reject the order.

Understand that there are 3 factors to the speed of gaining and losing the assist meter. The first is the main character itself. You would never know it, but each character has a certain speed to gain assist meter. It can range from very fast (Kurumi – 10sec from lvl 0-5) to very slow (Kaede – 25sec from lvl 0-5). It will come gradually and you cannot gain assist meter by attacking or blocking. The second is the level of the attack you want the assist to use. If Eko uses a lvl 2 assist, you must have lvl 2 meter and etc etc. The final factor is landing a counter attack while an assist is active. The meter will drop to 0 and your assist will be unable to do assists for awhile.

One of the best things to do while you have an assist active in neutral is to make a slow advance until the assist is back to your side. This could range from walking back and forth or not attacking at all. Keep your levels up around the 2-3 range since this is where all of the reversals go cost-wise. You never know when you need it. The worst thing that can happen is your meter be broken by getting too reckless. If the opponent is blocking by your assist and he doesn't use proxy, stay in when you can and stay your meter nominal (most lvl 1 moves are good blockstring extenders). Always remember that proxy costs 1-2 levels. Please keep this in mind when you start your offense with an assist.

I will make another article soon to break down a match and see how both parties take advantage of their assists and situations that involve the system in depth. Thank you for reading, and don't forget to discuss this article in the forums!

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7 Thoughts on “Vanguard Princess: General System Mechanics and Mindset”

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